

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** November 14, 2013

**Agenda Item:** Box Elder Creek Conservation Easement

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Preliminary Approval

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 min

### **Background:**

The Box Elder Creek Ranch is located south of Chinook, MT, approximately one mile east of the Bear Paw Battlefield National Historic Site and includes 8,120 contiguous acres (7,000 deeded and 1,120 state school trust lands). Approximately 7,300 acres (90% of the total) are native habitats, including mixed-grass prairie, shrub-grassland, wetland and riparian habitats. Box Elder Creek and associated riparian and shrub-filled coulees bisect the property for a distance of approximately 7 miles. A portion of the ranch includes glaciated plains with shallow wetland habitat. The ranch includes approximately 180 acres of wetland habitat.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results:**

FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, the Department would proceed with negotiations and conduct appropriate analysis and public review processes.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** The property provides a high quality mix of native wildlife habitats and associated game bird and big game hunting opportunities. The conservation easement option allows the ranch to remain in private management and ownership while conserving (and in some cases increasing) the productivity and ecological and recreational values of the property. This property is located in an area where the threat of conversion of native range to crop land has been increasing. In the absence of this project, the threat of conversion of this large block of native prairie, with associated wetland and riparian habitats, is significant.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends proceeding with this conservation project because of the potential threats and habitat conservation values associated with the property.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Commission give preliminary approval for this conservation easement project, allowing the Department to initiate negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.